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AUTHOR Chachere, Ernest G.; Johnston, Kathleen B.
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ABSTRACT

The results of a poll, conducted in an inner-city area in New Orleans, Louisiana, and designed to assess parent attitudes toward public education, is described in this report. The procedures used in determining the sample for this study included: (1) identification of all students attending the four feeder schools in the inner-city area; and (2) establishment of a systematic procedure for selecting at random those included in the poll. The results indicated overall positive but somewhat conservative views of public education. Furthermore, education was ranked first ahead of health, crime, and social welfare for priority in the expenditure of new funds. (JCD)

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# A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES TOWARD PUBLIC EDUCATION OF INNER-CITY PARENTS WITH CHILDREN ATTENDING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Ernest G. Chachere

Educational Leadership and Foundations
University of New Orleans
and

Kathleen B. Johnston

New Orleans Public Schools

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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# INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1981, the University of New Orleans/New Orleans Public Schools Teacher Corps Project conducted a poll of attitudes toward public schools of parents with children attending public schools.

The poll was conducted in an inner-city area of the city of New Orleans. The population surveyed was almost 100% black and about 85% with incomes below the poverty level. There is a substantially higher percentage of juveniles (38.6%) and a somewhat larger share of elderly (11.3%) than in the city as a whole. The area has 9.4% of the city's population, but accounts for 11.2% of major crimes (Office of Policy Planning, City of New Orleans, 1978).

A feeder system of four schools (2 elementary, 1 middle, 1 high) comprised the focal point of the survey. These schools are typical of many in urban areas across the country-buildings in need of repair, lack of materials, high turnover of teachers, low scores in standardized achievement tests and high rates of discipline problems and truancy.

## Background and Purpose of the Study

This survey, modeled after the Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, was conceived to determine attitudes of parents with children attending public schools toward public schools. The similarities of this study with the Gallup Poll fall within the general areas of (1) conceptualization and (2) the

replication and modification of selected questions used in the Gallup Poll. The researchers involved in this study acknowledge the significant contribution of the Gallup Poll toward this project.

The poll, though similar to the Gallup Poll in several areas, departs significantly with regard to (1) methodology employed to determine attitudes toward public schools and (2) several of the questions employed in the poll. Specifically, the poll utilized a telephone interviewing technique to ascertain attitudes while the Gallup poll employed a personal interview technique. Moreover, several of the questions in the poll were developed to focus on specific issues related to public schools in this area. However, most of these "specific issues" would have application to other sections of the country. The primary purpose of the study was to ascertain attitudes held by parents who have children attending public schools toward selected educational issues.

## Sample Selection

The procedures employed in determining the sample consisted of (1) identifying all students attending the four feeder schools in this inner-city area (2) establishing a systematic procedure for selecting at random from the list of students to be included in the poll. All students were assigned a number in sequence. A stratified random sample was selected from a computer generated list of random numbers. The sample was stratified according to the percent of students attending the school based on the total member in the population. Parent's name, address and telephone number were obtained for each student selected in the sample.

Alerting the sample population. To prepare the individuals that were selected to respond to this survey, an explanatory letter preceded the telephone survey. The letter explained the purpose of the survey, the importance of their response, time required of them and the use of the results. This prior explanation was designed to improve the cooperation of individuals surveyed and to reduce the number of contacts needed to reach the total sample size (N=212).

Selecting sample alternates. If the designated sample respondents were unable to participate in the survey or if the respondents could not be contacted, the next listing below the selected listing was utilized.

## Administration of the Instrument

In a two-hour training session, the 10 interviewers selected were provided with background information on the project and a thorough review of the interview instrument. The session also included a briefing on techniques and procedures, role playing of interviews, and practice with actual live interviews. Each interviewer was provided a small stipend for participation.

Interviews were conducted from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Mondays through Thursdays and on Saturday morning from 9:00 a.m. to noon. Six calling sessions were conducted from May 15 through May 25. All calls were made from a central phone bank under the supervision of the researchers. An average of slightly more than 30 interviews were conducted during each three-hour calling session.

The length of each interview averaged approximately 15 minutes. It is estimated that for each successful interview, an additional 15 minutes were consumed by technical matters such as busy lines and no-answer calls.

Letters to alert potential interviewers of the impending survey and to encourage their cooperation and assistance were mailed to approximately 300 households in the target area. Experience with this phase of the poll indicates that the pre-interview contact was instrumental in making each calling session productive, and may have been the single most important factor contributing to the successful completion of the poll.

## Sample Error

In selecting a sample to respond for the total population, there are always inherent biases. Every effort was used to recognize bias in sample selection and to minimize this error whenever possible. It is nearly impossible to correct for error caused by sample bias. The best approach is to recognize the biases and make value judgments as to the degree of error they might cause.

The biases in selecting the sample for this survey were (not in order of importance to the results):

1) The respondent must have had a telephone listing to be selected. This must be given consideration as a bias since several residents had unlisted telephone numbers or had phones that had been disconnected.

2) An adult at the sample household must normally be at the listed address during the evening hours.
3) Responses may have been different if they had been completed on an impersonal mailed questionnaire rather than talking to someone who knew their identity.
4) Responding in a telephone interview, the respondent might have given a reply to a question without really giving it much thought.
5) The respondent must be willing to respond at the convenience of the caller. The respondent might have rushed the replies because of immediate concerns.

In summary, every effort was made to minimize sample error. Certainly, the degree of possible error in sample selection must be an integral part of any value judgments reported concerning the data tabulated.

## Analysis of Data

In view of the substantial quantity of data generated for each question, it would be impractical to include an indepth interpretation of each question in this paper. For this reason, only those questions that have high significance receive comment. A more complete summary of findings and implications for education will be completed at a later date. The data are found on pages 5-10. Additionally, it should be noted that all data were reported in the form of percentages; that is, the percentage of those surveyed who responded to the question in a particular response mode.

# SURVEY RESULTS

SEX: 7.7% MALE 80.2% Female 12.2% NA

I. Number of School Children

| | |
|---|---|
| NA | .5 |
| 1 | 18.5 |
| 2 | 28.8 |
| 3 | 22.5 |
| 4 | 15.8 |
| 5 | 7.7 |
| 6 | 2.3 |
| 7 | 2.3 |
| 8 | 1.4 |

II. Are They All in Public School?

| | |
|---|---|
| NA | 1.8 |
| YES | 91.4 |
| NO | 6.8 |

III. Highest Level of Education

| | |
|---|---|
| NA | .5 |
| 4 | .9 |
| 5 | .9 |
| 6 | 3.2 |
| 7 | 5.0 |
| 8 | 3.6 |
| 9 | 7.2 |
| 10 | 12.6 |
| 11 | 11.7 |
| 12 | 45.0 |
| 13 | 4.5 |
| 14 | 1.8 |
| 15 | .9 |
| 16 | 1.8 |

IV. Did You Attend School in Orleans Parish?

| | |
|---|---|
| NA | 1.8 |
| Yes | 64 |
| No | 34.2 |

IVa. If Yes to IV

| | |
|---|---|
| Na | 31.1 |
| Public | 52.7 |
| Private | 8.1 |
| Both | 8.1 |

V. Age

| | |
|---|---|
| NA | 4.5 |
| 18-24 | 4.5 |
| 25-29 | 14.0 |
| 30-49 | 59.9 |
| 50-65 | 16.2 |
| + 65 | 0.9 |

VI. Occupation

| | |
|---|---|
| Health | 7.7 |
| Skilled Labor | 6.3 |
| Housewife | 20.7 |
| Clerical & Sales | 10.4 |
| Unskilled Labor | 1.8 |
| Other | 12.6 |
| Domestic/Janitor | 10.4 |
| Unemployed | 23.9 |
| Student | 1.8 |
| NA | 5.9 |

VII. Income

| | |
|---|---|
| - 10,000 | 43.7 |
| 10,000-15,000 | 14.4 |
| 15,000-20,000 | 5.9 |
| 20,000-25,000 | 2.3 |
| NA | 8.0 |

VIII. Child's School

| | |
|---|---|
| Guste | 15.8 |
| Williams | 10.8 |
| Derham | 28.8 |
| Washington | 42.8 |
| NA | 4.0 |

---

1. What is the Best Source of Information About Local Schools?

| | |
|---|---|
| Local Paper | 14.5 |
| Local TV | 14.5 |
| Local Radio | 2.7 |
| Word of Mouth | 25.4 |
| Schools Pubs. | 14.8 |
| Other | 6.8 |
| NA | 8.2 |
| Child Attendence | 15.2 |

2. Importance of Courses

| | Very Imp | Imp | NA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Art | 67.6 | 26.6 | 5.9 |
| Business | 88.3 | 3.6 | 8.1 |
| English | 95.9 | .5 | 3.6 |
| For. Lang. | 69.4 | 24.3 | 6.3 |
| Math | 91.8 | 1.8 | 6.8 |
| Music | 71.6 | 17.6 | 10.8 |
| P.E. | 85.1 | 4.1 | 10.8 |
| Science | 87.4 | 3.2 | 9.5 |
| Sex Ed | 82.4 | 9.0 | 8.6 |
| Soc. Studies | 91.0 | 2.3 | 6.8 |
| Voc. Ed. | 86.5 | 4.5 | 9.0 |

3. Teacher's Examination

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 83.3 |
| No | 9.9 |
| NA | 6.8 |

4. Should Teachers be Required to Take Advanced Work?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 89.3 |
| No | 2.3 |
| NA | 8.6 |

If Yes, How Often?

| | |
|---|---|
| Once a Year | 58.6 |
| Once Every 3 Years | 31.1 |
| Once Every 5 Years | 3.2 |

5. Most Serious Educational Need:

| | |
|---|---|
| Basic Skills | 48.0 |
| Better Teachers | 14.2 |
| More Equipment | 6.9 |
| Better Atmosphere | 8.8 |
| Additional Curriculum | 4.2 |
| Better Administrators | 3.5 |
| Better Buildings | 6.5 |
| Other | 5.0 |
| NA | 5.9 |

5a. Major Discipline Problem?

| | |
|---|---|
| Fighting | 19.7 |
| Vandalism | 3.9 |
| Drugs/Alcohol | 32.6 |
| Disrespect | 24.4 |
| Attendence | 2.9 |
| Disinterest | 9.6 |
| Other | 5.7 |
| NA | 4.5 |

5b. How Would You Solve This Problem?

| | |
|---|---|
| Increase Security | 19.2 |
| Explusion/Suspension | 5.8 |
| Stricter Rules | 28.3 |
| Hold Parents Responsible | 26.1 |
| Extracurricular Activities | 6.2 |
| Others | 11.2 |
| Na | 4.1 |

6. What Do You Like Most About The Public School Your Child Attends?

| | |
|---|---|
| Good Teachers | 32.0 |
| High Standards | 8.0 |
| Special Programs | 6.9 |
| Discipline | 4.7 |
| Small Classes | 1.1 |
| Close to Home | 13.5 |
| Good Home/School Communications | 12.4 |
| Good Principal | 5.8 |
| Extracurricular | 2.9 |
| Other | 21.0 |
| NA | 3.6 |

7. What Do You Like Least About Public Schools?

| | |
|---|---|
| Lack of Discipline | 13.6 |
| Low Standards | 3.1 |
| Drugs/Alcohol | 13.7 |
| Over-crowding | 5.1 |
| Teachers | 5.1 |
| Conditions of Bldgs. | 9.8 |
| Vandalism | 5.8 |
| Far From Home | 1.9 |
| Poor Organization | 10.9 |
| Other | 21.9 |
| NA | 6.8 |

8. How Many Visits to Your Child's School This Year?

| | |
|---|---|
| 1-3 | 27.5 |
| 4-6 | 59.5 |
| 7-12 | 0.0 |
| NA | 13.1 |

9. Would You Send Your Child to a Different School?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 51.4 |
| No | 41.0 |
| NA | 7.7 |

10. Grade for School's Quality of Work

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | 32.4 | D | 5.4 |
| B | 35.6 | F | 1.4 |
| C | 19.8 | NA | 5.4 |

10a. Grade for Teachers

| | |
|---|---|
| A | 41.4 |
| B | 37.8 |
| C | 9.0 |
| D | 3.6 |
| F | 1.4 |
| NA | 6.8 |

10b. Grade for Principal

| | |
|---|---|
| A | 52.7 |
| B | 24.3 |
| C | 11.3 |
| D | 2.7 |
| F | 1.4 |
| NA | 7.7 |

11. Do Your Kids Get a Better or Worse Education Than You?

| | |
|---|---|
| Better | 66.7 |
| Worse | 23.4 |
| NA | 10.0 |

12. Mainstream Special Ed Students?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 18.5 |
| No | 76.1 |
| NA | 5.4 |

13. Should Public Schools Finance Child Care?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 40.1 |
| No | 49.5 |
| NA | 10.4 |

14. Should Teachers Be Allowed to Strike?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 63.5 |
| No | 21.6 |
| NA | 14.9 |

15.

16. What Should Major Purpose of Education Be?

| | |
|---|---|
| Acquire Basic Skill & Knowledge | 34.1 |
| To Obtain Diploma | 8.0 |
| Provide Greater Independence | 10.7 |
| Job Preparation | 34.5 |
| Imporove Social Skills | 6.1 |
| Other | 3.2 |
| NA | 4.5 |

Summary

Several general impressions seem to emerge from this survey.

First, there seems to be a far more positive perception of the respondents concerning public schools which their children attend when compared with those experessed by respondents on a national level (Gallup Poll). Indeed, interviewers were impressed with the consistently complementary remarks toward public schools expressed by the respondents. Sixty-eight percent graded the quality of the school's work either A or B: Gallup respondents: 57% B or C. Thirty-two percent reported that what they liked most about the schools was the good teachers: Gallup respondents: 21%. Lack of discipline a front runner in 13th years of Gallup Polls received only 13.6%. In grading teachers and principals, the respondents were consistently positive:79% A's & B's for teachers; 77% A's and B's for principals.

Second, the responses seem to indicate a somewhat conservative view toward education. Examples: 76.1% oppose mainstreaming; 83.3% feel that teachers ought to be required to take examinations for certification; 89.3% feel that teachers should be required to take advanced work (58.6% say once a year); 48% identify the most serious educational need as improvement in basic skills. On a more liberal note, however, 63.5% feel that teachers should be allowed to strike. Perhaps the most surprising result was in response to the question regarding the ranking of categories for

the expenditure of new funds. Education ranked first ahead of Health, Crime and Social Welfare in that order.

Lastly, but very important, interviewers were pleased with the cooperation received. The respondents were not only interested in issues pertaining to education, but were most willing to express their viewpoints.

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